

953
M146
jo

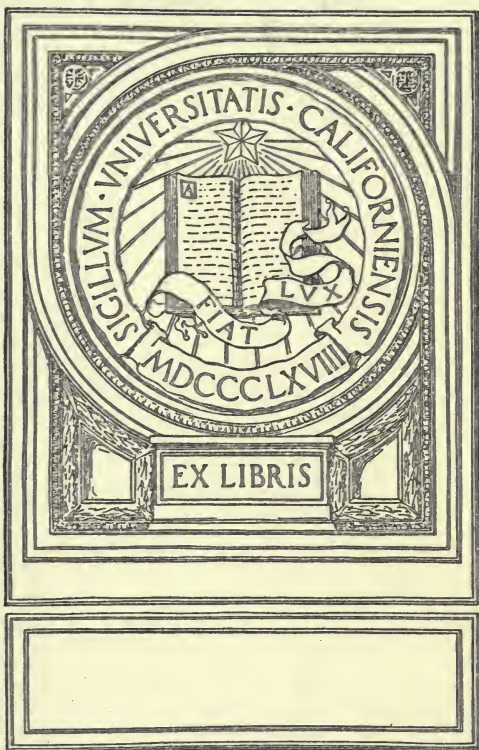
JOHN
MCGOVERN'S
POEMS

UC-NRLF



QB 165 984

Y0159124



JOHN McGOVERN'S
POEMS



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

JOHN
McGOVERN'S
POEMS



WILLIAM S. LORD
EVANSTON

1902

**COPYRIGHT. 1902. BY
JOHN MCGOVERN**

**TYPOGRAPHY BY
MARSH, AITKEN & CURTIS COMPANY, CHICAGO**

953

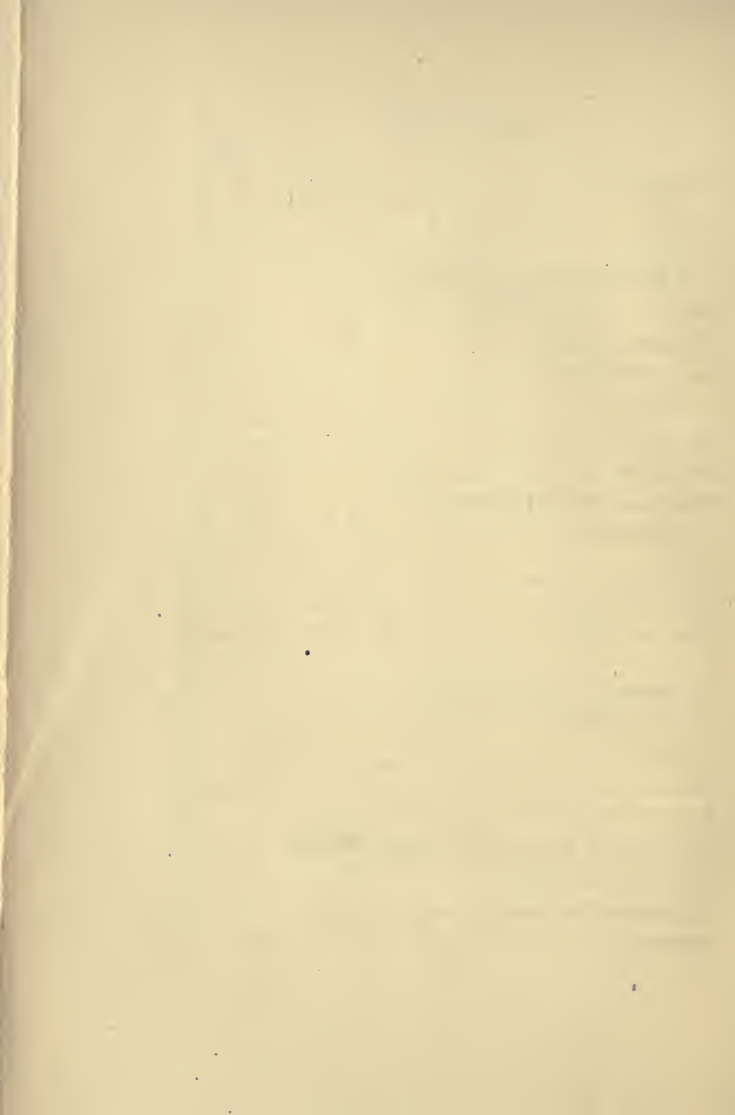
M146

jo

TO
MY BELOVED WIFE,
A HASTENING FRIEND, WHEN EVEN
NOBLE DUTY MIGHT HAVE
COME WITH STATELY
STEP

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE KINE	9
GENIUS	10
THE TREES	11
HOW BRIGHT JEHOVAH'S CARPET	12
PRIEST OF THE MORNING	13
I HEARD A LARK	14
COMET OF 1882	15
SUNRISE	16
I PRAY	18
THE POET	19
DEATH AND MY FELLOWS	21
TO RUBINSTEIN	22
TIME	23
A RHAPSODY	24
I SAW A LIGHT	26
HATE	27
IRKOUTSK TO SAN FRANCISCO	28
FANNY DRISCOLL	30
A LEAF	31
MEMORY	32
TO H. G. C.	33
SUGGESTIONS FOR A NAPOLEONIC DRAMA	34
THE SAINT IGNATIUS	37
A TRAGEDY OF STATE	41
PASTORAL	45



JOHN McGOVERN'S POEMS

THE KINE

SWEET-BREATHING kine looked up from
clover-mead,
And night had come. Therefore they kneeled them
down,
And soon the field was freshened, and perfume
Distilled for morn. With eyes as deep as heaven,
And peaceful as the evening, gazed the flock
Upon the skies; and in those eyes benign
All night on went the starry light eternal.
O wisdom of that wider view! They saw,
And were not envious. They knew enough
When they did know that Dawn would light their
meadow.

The sun came o'er a corner of the earth
Far to the north. Soft cooed the prairie-hens,
And yellow-breasted meadow-larks took wing
To chide their great dumb friends. Beshuddering
Their glossy coats, the kine arose, and lo!
(Hast ever seen a stretch of clover-bloom?)
The firmament had fallen to the field!

They from Orion to the Dragon roamed
And plucked that morn a thousand dewy stars.

GENIUS

IT IS the fire beneath some night-fly's wing,
Making a star out of the risen worm.

THE TREES

THE Sun came onward, scourging all the stars
Out of his temple. Maples, oaks, and elms
Stood foiled in gold, and sheltered timid airs
That scarcely moved from fear of March the Lion
Sleeping hard by. Thus passed a day of summer
Truant out of June, its wandering hours
Delighting Winter, calling heaven down,
And luring birds to love-songs.

Blear, unkempt,
The waking Lion roared; the pale North Wind
Sped from his realm. All terrified, the trees
Made lowly genuflections through the night,
Confessed their sin, and moaned for clemency;
Yet when their friend, the poet, came to them,
He found long rows of woody penitents
Dressed with disgrace—in convict garb of snow—
And wailing. "I myself am hurt," he said.
"So, if ye grieve, my barer woes may speak,
For ye have gnarléd circles round your hearts
Buckler on buckler. Strike your Eolian dirge—
Song of the sepulchre! O cruel years!
O Friendship's welcome turned to Venom's coil!—
O youth's ambition grown to manhood's greed!—
O spring of hope, and pale North Wind of Death!
Yea, weep, you maples, oaks and elms!" he cried;
"Ye are my better tongue, ye are my wo;
I saw your icy lord, I heard your prayers,
I know your sentence—sound our misery!"

HOW BRIGHT JEHOVAH'S CARPET

HOW bright Jehovah's carpet! Splendid Hour
Complete with glory—all thy
Milky Way

Pulsing eternity! Man upward looks;
He looks, and upward aims; and calm-eyed beasts
That sleep not, have thy golden deep for dreams!
Lo, I, most miserable of the flesh,
Proclaim within me throbbings of the light
From yonder stars. For I have something star-like
Jealously sentineled, and leashed with heart-strings,
Which, when the heavens throw their portals wide,
To pay thee, Night, their ceremonial,
Peers forth on each familiar galaxy,
As if those beacons burned for its return.
And as I lay my head at rest, each eve,
Thy oft-recurring mandate to obey,
O Night, I feel my prisoner more glad,
More confident of his release. Alas!
Why breaks my soul so quickly from my keep?
Why yearns, alas! my body for my soul?
Alas! why does my quivering form belie
Its wretched doom when I upsend my eyes!
O Night! forgive my bodily delight!
Forgive my body's envy of my soul!
Make my poor flesh and blood like calm-eyed beast's,
And let me have thy golden deep for dreams.

PRIEST OF THE MORNING

THE morning twilight surges through the dome—
The dawn awaits. So has my soul sat still,
And, like this day, full late the beam of peace
Has come from haunts deep in the Eastern stars.
Fierce writhes and coils the Night, and westward
rolls

A mass of darkness and despair, a load
To weight a Universe, put on a world!
O life! O God! O sea of orient sky!
There is with me an end of soughing waves!—
An end of casting anchors in mid-sea!—
An end of chart without a firmament!
Now Morn uplifts this sinister pavilion;
Now valiant Hope rebukes my soul's confusion;
Now Joy stands at the gateways of my heart
Guiding the flood. O Sun in hidden heaven!
Whose gold is liveried on thy couriers
The utmost clouds—whose coming carpets Earth
Beauteous with life—whose coming tunes the woods
With warblers' sweet devotions—to my voice,
My ruder song, give rapid messengers—
The invisible acolytes of thy golden fane—
To wing it to yon pillar in the air,
Thy morning altar lit with silvery fires!

Accept my offering; pour thy earliest gold
Out on thy pitiful, who then shall be
All holy-dipped, emerged from Paradise—
A glorious slave, thy shining worshiper!

I HEARD A LARK

I HEARD a lark amid the morning clouds
That wrapt his flight of song. As if that lark,
Seer of the dawn, rose on prophetic wing,
The sun now gorged the canyons of the sky,
And, all the barriers of the zenith breaking,
On happy Earth there flowed a shining ocean.

With this thing seeing, I, poor wonderling,
Made half of saddened sunlight, raised mine eyes,
Cast off my baser part, and grew eternal.

Lark of the earth, thy song shall still go on
When mocking blasts bestrow thy tiny plumes.
E'en now thy notes of earlier spring may be
Well out upon an awful pilgrimage,
Where dumb, despised, unshapen worlds go by,
And all is dark forever. Yea, although
The hand of Cruelty might scarcely feel
Thy heart-beats in its grasp, not less thy cry
May probe eternity, to leave behind
Faith's low petition and Doubt's loud harangue.

COMET OF 1882

BRIDE of the morning star, hath not my soul
Enough of envy in these nightly hosts?
Coms't thou to wake our spirits from their sleep
Of dumb, dull discontent? Bright apparition, fade.
O fade not from my clinging eyes! Take me—
Take that of me thou wilt—from off this orb
Where Sin and Death are prisoned; let me join
Thy splendid train, and aid, in dawning skies.
Those happier stars that bear thy shining veil.

SUNRISE

SWIFT Michigan, full-rigged with white cap sail,
Crowded to port her squadrons infinite,
Beneath a sky where Nature's dye was mixing
For maidens' morning blushes. Flying swallows
Surveyed the province ceded o'er to Dawn,
And called their links and chains in upper air
With iteration unmelodious.

Along the shore where envious waves peeped over,
A play-yard stretched for miles, and iron monsters,
Unyoked from toils and journeyings gigantic,
Shouted harsh-sounding joy. Tall shadow dancers
Woke into yachts, yet gaily reveled on,
While steamers cheerless as the eye of Greed,
And swoln with avarice, stole round the pier,
And put the waves to flight. The amethyst
And velvet air—where Night the Jeweler
Had spread bright riches brought from regions far—
On ruddier ether rose—as gently rose
As moves the sentried heart through dreams that
look

On scenes where all goes well. The lighthouse flash
That in the darkness oft had bridged the waves
With shining girders, flickered like a wick
Fal'n in the oil. As in swift-plowing ship
The venturous voyager, filled with low throbs
And vessel-motions multitudinous,
Peers toward the furnaces that shore his seas—
So toward the east, deep in the firmament
Forthcoming with the morning star, the eye

Peered to espy the heavenly enginery
That wheeled black-shrouded earth to shores of day.

Now all but man was ready. All but he
With little patience—quivering—beheld
This eastern panoply. In highest flight,
Where golden wings awaited, eager birds,
Like sailor on the mast, from tiny throats
Proclaimed the coming; bright on every spire
Shone confirmation. Rapt in fume and flame
The iron chargers, oft-defeated, looked
Upon their vanquisher. Out on the pier
From full six hundred thousand slumberers,
A dozen fishermen with dumb thoughts filled
And cast their lines again. The harbor-lamp
Grew thin and yellow, as it had been shut
Within a book for years. The yachts their dance
Pushed to a close, and Nature, thus prepared,
Glowed proudly on Lake Michigan, that then
Most splendidly returned her warmest smile.

Up rose the Sun all haired with living fires.

I PRAY

WHEN white-eyed Death shall fright my timid
flesh,
And chase my spirit from his habitation,
May willing yet unwilling hands take me
To unoffended Nature. Then, O God!
Give me the memory of an honest man,
And unseen flowers shall keep my grave as sweet
As lilac-banks that make one narrow week
The only recollection of a year.

THE POET

I

HE SITS before a great keyed instrument,
The human heart—built like some Alpine mill
To wheel its echoes to the joyous heights
Or urge them through the gloom. And as he sits
O'er all the jarrings of the rough red rill
That plunges down to Death, he strikes a chord,
And Love reverberates. Pleased with his craft,
He, holding all his keys, with quivering hands,
Joins on Affection's softening part, and plies
Sad Duty's stops and lowly harmonies.

Thus flows the psalm of Family and of Home—
The sweetest measures of the poet's art,
Yet on his mystic keyboard, oh! how few
The pipes that play!—how insignificant!

II

Then comes the flame, the flaming stride of War,—
The poet's hearthstone set to head the graves
Of slaughtered sire and son! Then breaks the storm
From forth the angry pipes; then comes the roar
Of mighty octaves, wild and tempest-tossed,
With passion-cries of freedom crashed and hurled
In grievous ruin, like some city's sack
Of precious wares. Behold yon tyrant's throne
Set high beyond the hurt of cannon's wrath!
Yet see it quake!—aye! 'tis an airy thing
To shore the moving deeps of Liberty!

III

The player trembles like his low-blown reeds,
His hand is weak, the snow drifts through his pipes.
Where breaks that flood which filled the gorge of life
With such sweet-sounding waves that voyagers
Baptized with freshened hearts?—the gloria!
Why drowns he not with joyous giant chords
The murmurs of an unhomed, childless wo?

Thou heedest not! The patriarchal ear
Hears from the strains on High some cadences;
He holds his touch upon the keys thus light
That he may join the Choir in unison.
Behold his agéd face (chiseled by Time—
An evil sculptor, yet a master-hand)!
Sublime he smiles and strikes the key of heaven,
Asking of his still noble house of sound
But this last anthem. Hark! it swells anew!
Now breathe in prayer and fall ye on your knees!
Now lave ye in the holy waves of holy airs!
The God of Hosts hymns with his wafting worlds—
Adoring Earth pulsates with Paradise!

DEATH AND MY FELLOWS

I THOUGHT, with selfish thankfulness: "If men
Were all immortal save myself, how sad,
How sadly terrible would be my plight!
How like the Aztecs' captive I should be—
A victim for the knife, though loaded down
With luxuries—if I were hailed each morn
By brothers of the sun! And, when I died,
With what astonishment the golden-aged
Would look upon my corse! my villain corse!
That in their company had flashed a gem
Which had been stolen—property of soul
Sought by the Officer!" With thinking this,
I went among my comrades yesterday,
And offered them ambrosia for their locks,
And nectar in their cups! I told them all,
That god-like ichor made their countenances
Most pleasurable—their flesh o'er-radiant!
The world smiled like a narrow-sighted babe
That sees, yet can but see, its mother's breast,
And I, poor courtier, sick with giving joy,
Fled toward my dreams last night in dismal dread
That death should cast his ashes over me,
And never-dying beings bear my pall!

TO RUBINSTEIN

*On hearing his Ocean Storm portrayed by one hundred and
seventy musicians.*

THOU shining soul, by Fame bright burning
kept,

Is God not angry when the wind is wailing
Hopeless with dread? And when He bids the storm
To whip the gamut of each shrieking shroud
And trumpet thunders—speaks He calmly then?

If thou, on shore no braver than thyself,
Canst key the sounding cloud, and at thy will
Chord all the terrors of the secret deep,
Then may those greater accents of God's voice
Be taught to me, if thou interpretest!

Before Jehovah's ark mute penitents
Bent round high priest, and breathing frankincense
And myrrh and holy oils, revived their souls.
Thou my high priest shalt be! Within thy fane
With formless ceremony, yet in garb
And ephod of bright genius, thou shalt list
To my devout and prostrate supplication;
Mine shall be thy rites, and thou God's power
Shalt bring to my blind soul, as I do hear
Great ocean's heart-beats sound a deep alarm
Lest God through space should hurl its screaming
bulk
Or scatter it for dew on waking worlds.

TIME

MAN whitens into death and lays him down
In dreadful slumber 'neath a roof-like mound
That sinks soon in upon his dust. A stone
His name proclaims a little longer, falls,
And crumbles, having filled an empty use.
Anon the plow rives up the fattened ground,
And harvests press like anxious waves. Then war.
The peaceful plowman flees before a host
Of conquering invaders come to sack,
And strip, and pillage. Soon the straggling brush
Starts into saplings, and the saplings wax
To solemn woods. Now comes the simple bard,
And peers with wonder in among the trees
That weave their colors with the fragrant air,
And sings: "This is the forest—this must be
The forest called primeval, and untrod."
Forward the cycles roll—the ax, the fires.
The plow, the harvest moons, the grave, the sword,
The impenetrable councils of the oaks,
And last some circlings of a corse-like orb—
Until the world, a worn and fluttering moth,
Drops in the central conflagration, and expires.

A RHAPSODY

Auroral Tumult on the morning of April 17, 1882.

FORTH from the watches of the night I gaze
To place the Greater Bear—Help! Help! the
world!

Awake! ye sleeping hosts, and read the sky!

A whirlpool snatching at a million streams,
Sucking the glory of the universe;
A cataract that falls where I would rise;
An awful flood, on which the stars shine strangely;
A tide ethereal, all space engulfing,
As though the current of the Milky Way
Had overflown—as though the wandering earth
Passed through the luster of some greater sun
Whose night was day! Fall down, self-sceptered
soul!

Fling off thy garb of state! Thou art within
The ante-chambers of the court of Heaven!

A tabernacle stanchioned with broad beams
Of silvery fire, and keyed with frosted stars;
And at the apex, waving scrolls of flame,
Doubtless two angels momentarily—
So that my favored soul should see them there,
Yet not in holy agony expire.

Quick from the mystic north the living light
Clambers the stars, or flows the fitting robes
Of God's ambassadors; and through the gate
Thick clouds of glory back and downward plunge,
As if outbound effulgence suddenly
Had peered on Sabaoth!

O God! Thou liv'st!
Thou surely liv'st! I am so near Thee now!
Open Thy reverent firmament to me!
Unshade mine asking eyes!—Protect mine eyes!

I SAW A LIGHT

I SAW a Light upreared afar, so pure
That to my constant gaze it seemed to come
Half-way to me. With hope born from our prayers,
We on a night of waters tossed; yet came
From other country of an eastern sky
The fearful pillage of a cold-eyed Dawn,
That stole our star to gem some new-made night,
And stationed Horror in our pilot-house.

I felt a Love so full of charity,
That to my yearning heart it seemed to come
Half-way to me. And then, all through a night
Filled with heart-broken days, I stood the watch
At misery's masthead, and in break of day
When Love died out, cried to my heart below
A dawn of darker night and deeper seas.

I saw the Truth afar, blazing so bright
That to my constant gaze it seemed to come
Half-way to me. All through a night of Life
I held my helm, until the morn of Death
Came on the world; then, as I peered,
Behold! my beacon vanished, and, alas!
I only saw its ashes eddying
Above the breakers of Eternity.

HATE

“**L**ET Merit cease to be!” This was the crime—
That Merit lived at all! Could *he* forgive?
Could *he* make reparation? Strike him down!
And Envy then might breathe again, and Hate
Accept apology! So Merit died.
Yet o’er his grave stood Hate, deep in the night,
While Courage slept, and on the low-hung clouds
Hate poured his woe—he had so small relief,
Though ’neath his feet great Merit lay in peace.

IRKOUTSK TO SAN FRANCISCO

On receipt of news from De Long by Telegraph, Dec. 21, 1881.

THE grinding ices of the central sea
Closed round our mariners. The continents
Peered past the circle of the Dipper stars
Through fog and storm—in fear. Then when the
King
Of Coldland fell upon these venturers
He crushed their hardy ship within his hand,
And cast them freezing toward Siberia.
They touch the world again, and all the world,
Pleased like a mother with her babe at breast,
Trembles with joy. These wonders have we seen
This white-haired year of this hoar century.

The *papa* lisped by kissing babe at night
Did drift on word-waves from Siberia's plains—
Did journey west, e'en like this telegraph,
Full twenty thousand miles, and yet did dwell
Full twenty thousand years upon the way!
How, then, shall simple songster read these signs?
Are scores of thousand zodiacs a jot
To point God's periods? Or is a flight
That jibes at distance, mocks at time, itself
An essence of the ages, or a soul
Of dying world? O God! I can but see,
Here in my darkness, that our compass spreads
Within Thy narrowest metes; I can but give

For shortest record in Thy chronicles
The years our dust shall moon yon noble sun!

The Aryan, this morning, stretched his hand,
And, o'er a pathway strewn with centuries,
Knocked at the Golden Gate! Such was the act!
Yet not more fugitive and brief than man!
Nor yet than his abode, this girdled orb!
A spark of light, sped by the craft of man;
A flash of years hurled from the hand of God—
So passes man's short history here on earth—
So passes earth's short history here in heaven!

FANNY DRISCOLL

LIFE woke within her, and her chorded soul
From harpéd heaven, breathed fine harmonies
E'en when Eola passed, at which Eola led
That way her Sister, whom devout mankind
Have left unnamed; straightway the poet's wand
Built up a temple and a worship lit
That famed the region. Then the people cried:
"Behold! a priestess, yea, a prophetess!"

And as her temple rose, and multitudes
Surrounded, clamoring, she added then
A holier rite—where woman at her best
With warmest heart most glorifies the world.
Now blazed her altar, and her oracles
Had life's full meaning; yet that very blaze
Warmed into life the python Phthisis, coiled
Close by the sacred flame. One cruel blow
That serpent struck, and set the poet's clay:

As flees Eola when the cloud-wheel stalks
Red-cored with lightning from Dakota's plain,
So fled the poet's soul when vorticed Death
That sweetly censored temple overwhelmed.

Grim airs of Death, ye leave our fields so bleak
We have no flowers for our sweet poet's grave!

A LEAF

FROM out the topmost bulb—a budding sentry—
A leaflet spread its green against the blue;
The songsters heralded its earthly entry
And it was christened in the Morning's dew.

All through the summer, on an oak that towered,
A stately captain of his lordly kind,
It fanned the birdlings in their nest embowered,
Or from their housing turned the churlish wind.

Then Autumn chanting came, in vestments sober,
Bearing the cup of dissolution's lees;
Forth in the majesty of hazed October,
A withered leaf was hearsed upon the breeze.

MEMORY

OUR hopes may lie as cold as love fear-sapped—
As ripe to be inhumed oblivion-wrapped—
Yet mournfully we keep them on their biers,
Palled in the shadows of the gloomy years.

Deep in our misty woe we hover prone
Above their corses, and, with bated groan,
The story of their life and death recite
Unto our only friend, the poor, blind Night.

Our wounds are all we have—we love them well;
Their quickness pleases us—we nurse the spell;
Not one of us dare crave, for our distress,
The clammy keep of blank Forgetfulness.

TO H. G. C.

BIRD in these woods! how drear to me
The moaning of these woods will be
When thou dost sing thy morning lay
In fairer forests, far away!

When ermined Winter scowled on thee,
A wandering warbler, sad to see—
Meek was thy mien 'neath his restraint,
Thy plumes were piteous, not thy plaint.

But when the Summer came to thee,
How thou didst swell with melody!
Thy song will ever welcome be
In my sweet-echoing memory.

Bird in the woods! how mute will be
These music-throbbing leaves to me
When owls of envy, hawks of scorn,
Hoot through the night, rail at the morn!

SUGGESTIONS FOR A NAPOLEONIC DRAMA

I

NAPOLEON AFTER MURDERING D'ENGHEIN

I THINK I killed ten thousand men at Friedland.
I know it made me qualmy of the blood—
Though I had won my war-legs, and had seen
Some horrors. “Bravo!” cried the clods and crowns;
“This general fights like Mars! Let’s make him
peace!

Let’s call him master, cousin!” Yet—I clip
One royal wart from off the public weal,
That’s pinched mankind to penance, like some bean
Blistering a fool’s heel—and these same clods
Shudder like jelly! Bah! God’s wounds! . . . And
still

France must not brood on even this one egg
Of discontent, or I, her stile-brained choice,
Crowned by her patriarchal pontiff, oiled
By simpering tongues, will flounder. Too much
blood

Flows in her veins. She needs the leech of war!
By the raft of Tilsit! she shall have it!

II

NAPOLEON AFTER WATERLOO

MY SHIP is past my helm; I wait the shock
That breaks my keel. One moment on those
rocks

And I, great wreck, shall strow the beach of Time,

Piling the higher with the ages. There
Let little conquerors, upon the income
Haply of their good tide, pick up small fragments
From my rich voyage, and forge themselves thereby
Proud salutations! Ah ye world of midges,
Little did ye know how with a brand the more
I could have burned the air free of your corpses!

III

THE DEATH OF NAPOLEON

[*The Rock of St. Helena—Napoleon dying—Doctors
and attendant—A great storm.*]

NAPOLEON. Six years have knit the broken
bones of the world.

Cæsar and Alexander, Hannibal,
I join you.

ATTENDANT. There's danger in this storm.

DOCTOR. I fear it.

NAPOLEON. Moscow, Leipsic, Waterloo,
Cease troubling me! Ye mar the deeper chant
Of wars that on a weeping world enthroned me!

ATTENDANT. Sire, it is the storm—'tis nothing but
the storm!

NAPOLEON. Holy Alliance of the elements,
Shout o'er my soul! It was imprisoned before
An army of small Kings had taught to men
This use of St. Helena. All your waves
May scourge this rock, and all oncoming time
May push its greedy billows; my great name
Shall flash, a towering light upon the reef,
To warn all men against ambition.

ATTENDANT.

Sire!

O Sire! renounce ambition: *speak* to me!

NAPOLEON. Ambition! ay, it is the coast of Hell!

And they who cruise thereby a helm must hold

Gigantic. O it is sad for the envious

To come that way! They sail for cargoes rich

Their leaking ships to load; there's greater hope

For little children begging charity

Of mouse-faced men!

DOCTOR.

His heart-beats quicken! God!

'Tis history!

NAPOLEON.

Aha! an eagle's beak!

[*Clutching his heart.*

Pluck deep, proud bird! 'Twill run in your blood!

Your chicks

Will in the storm-cloud build their tabernacle.

[*Falling back.*

I die—a simple word—a simple thing.

When Death sits by the great they do not weep

The world good-by. With smiling face they greet

Our equal minister.

[*Death dimly revealed as a skeleton, seated on the
further side of the couch.*]

Good Pastor, know

That I sought not this corner of thy parish,

Giving thee journey. France should set mine urn

Within our capital—'twould profit her

More than her palaces. To eternal rest

I give my clay; this oldwife Earth will long

And lovingly prate of the spouse who beat her.

THE SAINT IGNATIUS

A SCHOLAR, lightly reading, heard the storm,
Yet used it for his comfort. Roaring grates
Mocked at the gale. Through parlor-arches flowed
Faint airs like summer waves, so peacefully
That though they sought a well-accustomed ear
They seemed to ride some new-discovered sea,
And passed unknown, to strand amidst perfumes.

Thus read the scholar:

“Once upon a time,
The Etruscan country sounded far the fame
Of Saint Ignatius, Best of Blessed Men,
And filled with holy fire; until a fervor
Seizing on a youth, he sought, and, journeying,
He found the monk, and in his monastery,
The Brothers Paul, Maximilian, Eustace, Luke,
Marcellus, Simon, Vincent, Hilary,
And Pius—holier men than common mortals.

“With hope of gaining heaven the youth besought
Those monks that he might join a timid voice
With their loud adorations. Thus it came
This worshiper was soon a novice in
The trade of praising God. He ate the husks
And chaff of outer form until his soul
Grew gaunt and meagre. So, one day he spake
And said unto the saint and brothers nine

That he should leave them. Then, their under
eyelids
Drooping on their cheeks, the friars crossed them-
selves,
Spurned him, and, in their wrath, threw ashes on
him.

“So journeyed he unto a mighty town
Where wealth unmeasured waited him, and years
Piled up his fame, until no distant land
Outlay his reputation. All the past—
As dusk dissolves at dawn—went from his mind.
But through these times, a war and scandals
vague
Had brought our monks to beggars’ beggary.
Therefore it came to pass, one wintry night,
That as the great man sat in his rich home,
And Comfort held the citadel,—a storm
Encamped about, balked but beleaguering—
There came a knock upon his outside portals,
Knocking with loud assurance as of kinsmen
Come to a Christmas feast. Whereat he ordered
The opening of his massive doors; and there
With under-eyelids drooping on their cheeks,
Stood Saint Ignatius, Best of Blessed Men,
And Brothers Paul, Maximilian, Eustace, Luke,
Marcellus, Simon, Vincent, Hilary.
And Pius,—all the ten, ten times unwelcome.”

Then natural weariness and luxury
Combined to stop this tale. The scholar’s eye
Roamed past the arches where red firelights, flash-
ing,

Jeweled the trappings, or in fairy fabrics
Arrowed barbaric wounds; anon his gaze
Visited a far salon, where tigers glared,
And shrinking leopards crouched in tawnier wools
From Anatolia—carpetings that waved
Like growing grain. On ebb'd the harmonies,
Almost as subtle as the soul—elusive
E'en as happiness!

Lured thus, the scholar
Sadly remembered him how, like the novice,
He in his boyhood worshiped where a priestess,
Sitting demurely at her instrument,
Made him her slave, yet simply played Pique Dame
And Zampa, Trovatoré, Traumerei,
And William Tell. To him those strains became
An ecstasy of hope. Anon she swept
The throbbings of his heart, finding them not
Delightful to her touch, so that the youth
Was left by Love to die; but he sprang up,
And, as he mended his hurt heart, the maid
Still at her siren keyboard played Pique Dame
And Zampa, Trovatoré, Traumerei,
And William Tell, which thence, with gradual years,
Grew sweet once more, and served the requiem
Of his agony. Soon a maid more fair,
More happy, and more lovable, he wooed
And wed, while all the years outran each other,
Bringing him blessings and renown.

But, wondering
Why thus the witch Remembrance croned her
ghosts

To fright Contentment, up the scholar rose
And strode adown his parlors. Then the music
Waking his mind once more, he needed nought
To tell him why his moments had been saddened.
A favorite daughter, sitting in an alcove,
Seeking to please his ear, had played Pique Dame
And Zampa, Trovatoré, Traumerei,
And William Tell. Thus through his revery
Had stalked the shades of a forgotten passion—
Thus opened memory's outer gates, and there,
With under eyelids drooping on their cheeks,
Stood Saint Ignatius, Best of Blessed Men,
And Brothers Paul. Maximilian, Eustace, Luke,
Marcellus, Simon, Vincent, Hilary,
And Pius—all the ten, ten times unwelcome.

A TRAGEDY OF STATE

THE morn!—as gray as was the look of death
Upon my husband's face! I could have wished
The morn had never come—yet when I knew
It stole upon the murder of my son
I had no patience. Out on such a day!
A cancer on all time! E'en now the slaves
Behold my boy with executioner's red lust,
And laugh like grave-dogs. O how I did plead!
(When was't—I've slept not!—'twas the day
before—

And God! to-morrow will be afterward)—
Ay, yesterday I kneeled before that man,
And prayed as one should pray to God alone
To aid my cause! O Governor! O hear!
My son did lift his hand in blood made hot
With cursed wine. He did that thing of shame
In wildest passion. Then let not this law,
Built in men's wisdom, fall on his young head
And break me with the stroke!" "Good woman,
list:

You think not of the victim slain, a mother
Visiting his early grave and planting flowers
With hand by horror palsied!" "O great sir,
Have mercy! Would that my poor son had fal'n
And I passed by the copings of the rich
To find an humbler grave and shed my tears!
That, sir, were grief—but not a devilish grief
To wreck the human soul. Revolting God!

Must I, then, grasp the brush of obloquy
And mark the headstones of a line of sires
All pure and honorable? If this blow
Fall on my head, have I, then, but the woe
Of that sad mother? Hearken, O great sir!
This law was made by men well satisfied
In life, afar from deadly acts. Would they,
O sir—would they build up a thing from Hell
To tear the holy life from out a man?
Would they come from such sacrifice and set
This devil's ceremony in its place,
Among our laws the foremost? Never! No!
And you—who can by one small, written thing,
Estop this second curse—would you for hire—
For all the welcome gifts of your high power—
Go to that den of death and strain the life
Out of this fellow being? Nay, O nay!
Do not therefore, I beg, drive those base hinds ,
Who group around my son to eat his flesh
And earn their bread by toil so damnable!"
"Good man!" he said, as he had said "Good woman!"
"Good man, show her the way! I fear she needs
Some help to walk! Good woman, I will act
As well becomes my duty. If I find
My pity can have ear, you may take hope!"
And at the very time, as I did turn,
He bade a second clerk the case was closed,
And other matters pressed.

O breathing life!
Hast thou lain coiled within my heart this while
A deadly snake? Am I a thing of death,
A living upas, bearing fruit of men

Who must be tracked and torn by human hounds?
Upon the green I played with little girls:
My breath was sweet, my eyes were blue, my hair
Was such that good old men would stop awhile
To stroke my head and ask my name. At night
My mother heard my sins, and found her heart
Full wide for blessings, teaching me that God
Had yet a greater love. And, as I grew,
No warning came. My husband bore me forth
While lanterned steeple rocked with wedding-bells;
And of the love we had we built a home
Which Death espied. Then went my husband out
The dreaded journey and my babe sucked salt
From sorrow's breast! *Mayhap 'twas there the child*
Fed on the sin—ay, let me have the hope:
That then in agony the murder-draught
Was filtered. Thus my soul with kinder look
May leave my wretched body. Thus my son
With parent ghost may walk beyond this world
In mien all nobly sad.

The hour of Death.] My friends, forgive!
I soon will be the mother of a corse
Made by the State. The State thus deals with me.
And I do ask you, stand without, and watch
That I may know the earliest approach
Of that which now awaits.—I am alone!

A courier:]

Let not that messenger come near whose words
Stand on his ugly face—I'll not have it

Drinks:]

How sweet this cup! How kind these murderous
pains!

How quick!—not e'en a tithe so horrible

As smiles of pity from a Governor.

Dying:]

Then this is death! I had some girlish hope
There would be light! 'Tis cold—I have not felt
Such cold before. 'Tis further than I thought.
O shades! if ye be round me, cry aloud!
Where waits my son? My son, desert me not!

PASTORAL

I

IMMERSED in sunshine, tremulous, intense,
Lie depths of wheat, and corn, and pasturage;
And where the acres meet in rivalry,
A miser-pond evades the Sun-King's tithes,
Hiding with lily leaves an envied hoard.
Far off, an oaken family surround
A giant of hard fibre, who has sat
At feast with Time himself, and banqueted
On centuries. There well-fed cattle stand,
Watching unenviously the outer sky,
Where cloud-flocks graze upon the sides of heaven.
Some proud pond Ararat has stayed a plank
And raised it well aslant; upon this perch
A row of turtles bask their checkered backs,
And view with stolid look the overtures
Of nodding reeds and fawning marsh-grass nigh.
The weary wheat-stems stoop like mendicants,
While alien rye-stalks rear their empty heads.
The corn—(just o'er a fence where chipmunks
romp)—
A green, cockaded host, in phalanx drawn,
Each soldier armed with many cutlasses—
Bespeaks the pomp of disciplined array,
Nor flinches in the fervor of the sun.

O'er all a storm-portending haze; from all,
A heated perfume—clover, wheat, and corn.

II

The swan-like clouds that swam with swelling wing
In tropic, halcyon, horizon seas,
Have changed to furious cars of war, and drive
To offer scowling battle with the sun.
High o'er Andean lines of clouds there looms
A solemn Chimborazo of the sky,
And from its avalanching sides flash forth
The spears of hosts in heavenly ambushade.

The black clouds upward clamber, and the mount
Attains new height, till now, as Titans mad
Pile other mountains on too recklessly,
The upper fabric topples—yet, indeed,
Some nightmare compromise with gravity
Leaves Earth uncrushed.

Anon, a horrid sight
Hovers on high: The flapping storm-cloud seems
A mighty vampire come to suck the world.

Hotly the archers pour their golden darts
From parapets of light and battlements
With glory blazing—dreadlessly and dire
Not less, their hideous enemy assaults
The splendid citadel—alas! how soon
Beleaguered Day is fallen prisoner!

Now dirgeless shadows in long pageant come,
Of gloom the celebrants, death-angel-like;
And as their progress blackens field and pond

The turtles scramble down in clumsy haste,
And loyal cornstalks on the distant hill
Wave goodbys sunward with bright oriflammes.

Down through an air come up from nether earth,
Forth from the turmoil of inverted seas,
A fiery force with crash on crash is hurled,
Thrilling all things as if the startled earth
Rocked in volcanic violence. This signal made,
The volleys of the pirate squadrons pound
Hard on the haughty corn, the modest wheat,
And on the lily leaves like musketry
Rattle their crystal bullets. Gusts of air
Chase nimble swirls of rain; through yeasty mists
A million worlds join to the universe,
And shackles of white lightning manacle
The trembling sky. Heaven is an idol-house,
Thick with abominations, and its walls,
Its lurid walls, are darkened with the shapes
Of pagan elements in revelry.

III

The storm recedes, the sun shines out, the clouds,
Like fallen fortresses, their portals ope
Before the flight of earthward-hurrying beams—
And lo! the couriers with their victory!
The music of the herd comes o'er the mead
In homely cow-bell tones, as rude to-day
As in Pan's time. The clover-synod kneels—
Each tiny bishop's mitre lit with gems—
And silken rustles fill the aisles of corn,
As though the wives of modern Pharisees
Passed to their public prayer. Behind a gorge

Of ether icebergs, Hope, at azure loom,
In warp of sunrays with a woof of rain,
Arches her rainbow web upon the black
That curtains all the east, where crowds the storm.

GREENFIELD TOWNSHIP

La Grange County, Indiana, 1861.

	MS15749	953
McGovern, J.		M146
John McGovern's		jo
poems		

̄M515749

953
M146
jo

